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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000164

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DEPARTMENT FOR DAS BRYZA, EUR/CARC, AND EUR/RPM

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TAGS: PREL PGOV GG

SUBJECT: GEORGIA'S ANNUAL NATO ASSESSMENT: ON BALANCE
POSITIVE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: On January 31, NATO International Staff (IS) briefed NATO Ambassadors and Defense Attachés in Tbilisi on the highlights of their latest assessment of Georgia's International Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), the draft of which would be circulated to NATO Allies in Brussels by mid-February. Delegation Head Robert Weaver characterized the assessment as overall positive. He and others said that the Georgian preparation and planning for this assessment was the best the team had ever seen. They also noted that Georgians, for the first time, were "getting it" in that they are no longer claiming that everything is perfect. Despite a tough political year, they noted substantial reform progress.

On political issues, NATO IS reported good progress including the passage of a law on ex parte communications, less use of pre-trial detention, and the opening of the High School of Justice. Still, they emphasized the need for more progress on judicial independence. They also highlighted the importance of staying on track toward peaceful resolution of the conflicts, better engagement with civil society and improving the elections process before parliamentary elections in May. On defense issues, NATO IS commended Georgia's Strategic Defense Review (SDR) and the consultative way in which it was developed and noted areas of improvement including better use of the defense acquisitions process, improving the functioning of the joint staff and fixing the military personnel system. He said Georgia needs to make some key decisions soon including on a Navy and Air Force. End summary.

OVERALL POSITIVE REPORT

¶2. (C) On January 31, NATO International Staff (IS) members in Tbilisi briefed NATO Ambassadors and Defense Attachés on the highlights of their latest assessment, the draft of which would be circulated to NATO Allies in Brussels by mid-February. NATO IS Delegation Head Robert Weaver characterized the assessment as overall positive. He and others said that the Georgian preparation and planning for this assessment -- the fifth -- was the best the team had ever seen. He said the Georgians had taken seriously the issues raised by the IPAP assessment last year and had responded to each issue "point by point." Also, despite a tough political year, there had been substantial reform progress. He noted that Georgia's aspirations with regard to a Membership Action Plan remained "extremely high" and emphasized that the NATO IS team said that such a decision was a political one that was up to the Allies.

JUDICIAL REFORM PROGRESS YET MORE WORK TO DO

¶3. (C) On political issues, NATO IS James Mackey reiterated that Georgia was better prepared than ever. For the first time, he said, Georgians were "getting it," and had began the hard process of identifying shortcomings rather than simply claiming that everything is perfect. He noted positively that the Georgians had taken on the areas where the last assessment identified concerns and offered detailed and substantive responses. Citing judicial reform, he pointed to progress in the passage of a law banning ex parte communications, the less frequent use of pre-trial detention, and the opening of the High School of Justice. He emphasized the need for more progress on judicial independence. Weaver also raised the importance of continued work toward the peaceful resolution of conflicts and welcomed Georgia's change of tone with Russia and the absence of anti-Russian rhetoric.

¶4. (C) Turning to more controversial issues, Mackey said that he approached the events of November 7 and the disputes surrounding the elections by promoting "lessons learned" and an adoption of "best practices." Mackey said he would draw heavily from the language in the international monitoring mission in his reference to the elections. He offered that even civil society seemed to have difficulty in determining what was a violation of the electoral code and assessed that clarifying the electoral code is a key needed improvement before the parliamentary elections. He said he also raised the issue of the arrest last fall of former Defense Minister Okruashvili. He said he advised the Georgian government to use the case to prevent high level corruption in future, such as by improving Parliamentary oversight over defense expenditures. Weaver welcomed President Saakashvili's creation of an advisory council to monitor high level corruption.

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GOOD SDR ALTHOUGH SOME MORE WORK NEEDED ON DEFENSE REFORM

¶5. (C) On defense issues, NATO IS staff member Frank Boland said that there were a number of areas in which the Georgians showed clear signs of progress, including the Georgian commitment to military operations which he termed impressive for a country of Georgia's size. He also commended Georgia's SDR and the consultative way in which it was developed. Boland highlighted other areas of improvement including in military education, nuclear/biological defense capabilities, and the decision to end conscription and move to a fully professional force. He noted areas of needed improvement including better use of the defense acquisition process, improving the functioning of the joint staff, and fixing the personnel and resource management systems.

¶6. (C) Boland touched upon a couple of outstanding questions which he said the Georgians needed to answer in the near future. One was how or whether to consolidate logistics and maintenance functions for MOD and MOIA helicopters. He had been told this issue is with the National Security Council and hoped there would be a final answer soon. A second was the future shape of the Georgian Navy - whether it would be along the lines of a military force or a coast guard. He said NATO IS has advised that it should be a coast guard. The third and final issue is the future of the air force. Boland stressed the importance of Georgia being able to make an offer of helicopters to Afghanistan as NATO is considering leasing helicopters from other countries in order to try to fill current requirements.

¶7. (C) NATO IS Bruce Bach added a concern on the issue of training. He said that many Georgians are trained by NATO governments only to return to Georgia but not to the Georgian military, which he believed was a waste of a training slot and Allied assistance. He said that he asked for a list of all the military personnel trained abroad over the last four

years and where they are now -- almost 20%, he said, were no longer in the military. He said NATO IS had criticized Georgia on this point three or four years ago and suggested that Allied governments press the Georgian Government on how it will use military personnel once they return from training abroad.

NATO WANTS PREDICTABILITY AND "NO SURPRISES"

18. (C) The team concluded that what the Allies are looking for in Georgia is predictability in terms of the kind of country and military force they would get in making the political decision on membership. In essence, they said, Allies want "no surprises." They also made clear Georgia's right to call upon the 26 plus 1 format to present its views directly to Allies in Brussels.

COMMENT

19. (C) Although Weaver said that the NATO Secretary General's crucial statement following the November 7 events reflected surprise that Georgia did not inform the Allies of its actions, the NATO IS report was on balance positive and forward looking. Privately, James Mackey expressed concern that some of the allies might try to insert a lot of negative into the report by focusing on the November 7 events in an effort to influence discussions on whether Georgia is ready for a MAP. In all his discussions with the Georgians and in the report, he hoped to focus forward, on both the progress and areas of continued needed work. Also privately, DCM asked Boland how NATO IS sees Georgia compared with Ukraine. Boland said the IS will know better after the next IPAP Review of Ukraine in 3 weeks. But at this point, he saw Georgia as a big step ahead. He welcomed Ukraine's renewed focus on IPAP but said there are significant fundamental problems such as lack of realism on defense budgeting, insufficient preparation and operational planning.

TEFFT